

"Charting the Landscape/Mapping New Paths": Project Descriptions

1. **Project Name:** *We're Making Connecticut History (WMCH)*
2. **Goal:** This project links the study of Connecticut history at the fourth- and fifth-grade levels with the interaction of students from diverse backgrounds. Urban and suburban classes are partnered for multiple visits to the CHS Museum and other museums and cultural centers in the region. The program's main goals are to increase student achievement, reduce racial, ethnic, and economic isolation, build positive, meaningful relationships among students, and promote multi-racial, multi-cultural understanding. Between 600 and 800 children participate each year depending on levels of available funding.
3. **Participating institutions/agencies:** Connecticut Historical Society (CHS) Museum, State Department of Education, Capital Regional Education Center, Farmington Public School System, Hartford Public School System, Rocky Hill Public School System, Wethersfield Public School System, and Windsor Public School System.
4. **Your role/expertise in this type project:** CHS Museum's focus on collecting, preserving, making accessible and interpreting the history of Connecticut's diverse population, past and present, provides an educationally rich environment for inspiring students to learn from the experience of others, find common ground with them, and aid in making informed decisions, which will shape society now and in the future. The informal learning environment of the museum and educational hands-on activities created specifically for the *WMCH* Interdistrict program utilizes the CHS's collections and exhibits to address the State Department of Education's major Interdistrict goals.
5. **Outcomes / successes to-date:** Over the past seven years CRE, an outside evaluator, has determined through data collected from participating students and teachers that "both positive changes in student attitudes toward others from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds and changes in academic performance" have occurred. *WMCH* is considered to be "one of the best-organized programs in terms of meeting the goals of the State Department of Education's Interdistrict Grant Program." Qualitative data indicates that students, teachers, and parents alike have experienced positive and

meaningful interactions during *WMCH* programming. One teacher stated “Although my students are aware of cultural differences, having a partner school made it more of a reality for them, expanding their attitudes toward others and improving their peer relations.” Student found that “it was fun to work with a partner and that they could make friends with new people if they tried.” Many students commented that being a part of *WMCH* has “made history fun.” Parents noted that students have “learned the importance of accepting and appreciating others regardless of their cultural, racial, or personal differences.”

6. Lessons learned: The creation of partnerships should not be random, but a brief student biography would aid teachers in making partner selections. In order to encourage the development of meaningful relationships among partner classes “character development skills” needed to be a component of each *WMCH* session. Student-centered field trip activities, e.g. hands-on, interactive, or inquiry based programming, are more engaging for students. Personal reflection worksheets are a valuable tool for qualitative evaluation of student learning and program design.
7. If we began anew we would ask these questions at the beginning: What type of teacher selection process would we need in order to evaluate the commitment level of each teacher? Should we create an advisory panel made up of teachers, administrators, and CHS Museum staff to discuss each school’s curriculum needs since Connecticut does not have a state required curriculum? What would be the best way to create student partnerships? Are there other funding sources we could tap into in order to increase the number of partnership visits?
8. Critical success factors: A yearly teacher orientation session, which allows for dissemination of new program information. Program design, organization and frequent communication that fosters a collaborative spirit between *WMCH* staff and the 24 participating teachers. Utilizing student biographies to create student partnerships. Selection of teachers and school systems, which are committed to diversity and multicultural programming and working closely with other museums and institutions to provide quality programming for students.
9. Our next steps will be: to produce a *WMCH* orientation video to show to future students, teachers, administrators, parents, potential funders and any interested party.

